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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES HUMAN RIGHTS WITH INDIGENOUS NGO

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Ambassador met on January 15 with Luis Evelis Andrade, Director of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC). Andrade described human rights and political issues faced by the Colombian indigenous community and welcomed increased engagement with the USG to confront those problems. Press coverage highlighted U.S. assistance to Haiti as well as the USG's interest in indigenous rights issues. End Summary.

INDIGENOUS SEE IMPROVEMENTS SINCE 2002,
BUT FACE RISING VIOLENCE

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met on January 15 with Luis Evelis Andrade, Director of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), and members of the ONIC board. The Ambassador emphasized that the mission of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) includes support to the indigenous community and highlighted the importance of dialogue in the U.S.-indigenous relationship.

¶3. (SBU) While indigenous homicides declined more than 75 percent between 2002 and 2009, Andrade expressed concern that the rate of homicides had begun to rise again -- ONIC reported 111 homicides in 2009 compared to 44 homicides in 2007. Andrade said of the 1,400 homicides ONIC had tracked since 2002, only 640 were recognized by the GOC and only six had been resolved by the judicial system.

¶4. (SBU) Andrade reported 3,649 indigenous had been displaced in 2009, a 50 percent reduction in displacements since 2002, but a rise since the 2007 low of 2,503. He noted other challenges faced

by the indigenous including forced recruitment by illegal armed groups, sexual violence, and confinement due to landmines and other violent tactics used primarily by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

15. (SBU) Andrade questioned the GOC's political will to support an autonomous and multi-cultural indigenous community as outlined in the Colombian constitution. He criticized the GOC for insufficient consultations with indigenous communities when commercial exploitation of indigenous land was at stake and for weak land tenure regulations to protect historic claims to indigenous land. Andrade expressed interest in working with USAID to develop projects to assist Colombia's indigenous.

PRESS COVERAGE

16. (U). In his statements during a press gaggle, the Ambassador emphasized the importance of ONIC's mission and indicated the United States would develop new ways to work with and support Colombia's indigenous communities. The Ambassador's remarks, which included details about the U.S. response to the earthquake in

Haiti, were covered in broadcast media. CM& (publicly owned national news channel, 507,000 viewers) highlighted the Ambassador's comments on Cuba opening airspace to U.S. flights headed to Haiti and mentioned U.S. interests in indigenous rights issues.

NICHOLS